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THE SPOILS OF VICTORY

The North in the shadow of the Roman Empire



THE SPOILS OF VICTORY

The North in the shadow of the Roman Empire



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*THE SPOILS OF VICTORY – THE NORTH IN
THE SHADOW OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE*

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Roman gryphon's head of gilded bronze.
Vimose. 2nd – 3rd century AD.

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*THE SPOILS OF VICTORY – THE NORTH IN
THE SHADOW OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE*

*THE NYDAM BOAT – A WARSHIP FROM THE
IRON AGE*

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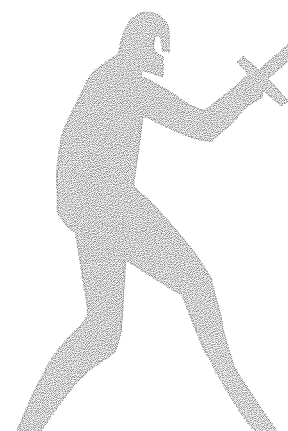
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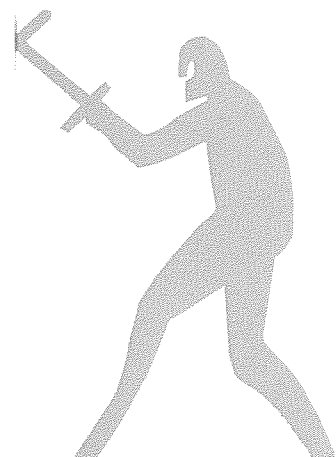
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Contents

4	Exhibition. Conception, coordination and production
8	Preface Prof. Dr. Claus von Carnap-Bornheim and Dir. Carsten U. Larsen
11	I INTRODUCTION
12	The Spoils of Victory – the North in the shadow of the Roman Empire Lars Jørgensen
18	The bog – the gateway to another world Flemming Kaul
44	Danish war booty sacrifices Jørgen Ilkjær
66	Denmark's bog find pioneer
	The archaeologist Conrad Engelhardt and his work Stine Wiell
84	150 years of weapon-offering finds – research and interpretations Ulla Lund Hansen
90	War, state and society Peter Johannes Schjødt
105	II ROMANS AND GERMANI
106	Cosmopolitan aristocrats Birger Storgaard
126	Roman sources for the geography and ethnography of Germania Thomas Grane
148	The soldiers of the Roman Empire and the Roman army Bodil Bundgaard Rasmussen
166	Woe to the vanquished! John Lund
172	The first runes – the literary language of the Germani Marie Stoklund
180	Weapon graves and regional groupings of weapon types and burial customs in Denmark, 100 BC – 400 AD Margrethe Watt
194	Fortifications and the control of land and sea traffic in the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age Anne Nørgård Jørgensen

III THE WEAPON SACRIFICES AND THE GERMANIC ARMY	211
The Hjortspring find – The oldest of the large Nordic war booty sacrifices Flemming Kaul	212
The Vimose find Xenia Pauli Jensen	224
The ornamental belts from Ejsbøl Bog and Neudorf-Bornstein Claus von Carnap-Bornheim	240
New investigations in Ejsbøl Bog Hans Chr. H. Andersen	246
Nydam Bog – new finds and observations Erik Jørgensen og Peter Vang Petersen	258
Warrior art, religion and symbolism Peter Vang Petersen	286
The ships from Nydam Bog Flemming Rieck	296
The Germanic army – Warriors, soldiers and officers Xenia Pauli Jensen, Lars Jørgensen og Ulla Lund Hansen	310
The coins in the bogs Helle W. Horsnæs	330
The armamentarium of the army surgeon Annette Frölich	342
IV BOGS AND PRESERVATION	345
The sacrificial bogs of the Iron Age Charlie Christensen	346
The preservation of the past for the future Henning Matthiesen	356
V CATALOGUE	365
VI LITERATURE	438

Roman sources for the geography and ethnography of Germania

THOMAS GRANE



FIG. 1. *The Dying Gaul.*
Hellenistic statue from
Pergamon in Asia Minor, c. 220
BC. Cast from the Royal Cast
Collection, Statens Museum for
Kunst, Copenhagen. Polfoto.

An important source of our knowledge of Germania and the Germanic peoples in the centuries around the beginning of our era is written reports and descriptions. But since at that time the Germani did not yet have a writing tradition, these sources mainly come from Greek and Roman authors. Over the centuries, these writers devoted their attention to the Romans' Germanic neighbours for various reasons and with different aims. The first reports appear in connection with hostilities, one of the oldest known instances being the campaign of the Cimbri and Teutones, who swept down through Europe in the second century BC, ending in northern Italy, where they were defeated by the Romans. Julius Caesar too encountered Germani in the course of his wars in Gaul. The Germani as soldiers are also mentioned in positive contexts – as Roman auxiliaries. The Romans made great use of auxiliary troops, some of them from the subjected provinces, some from areas outside the Roman borders from which they entered into military service with the Romans. In addition there are works that describe the customs and manners of the Germanic peoples, their physical appearance and their hardiness. There are also accounts of the geography of Germania and the locations of the Germanic peoples in relation to one another. Often these descriptions are simply part of some larger work about the whole known world, but a few did focus solely on Germania. This article will first and foremost concentrate on the way that people in the Roman world conceived of the Germani and Germania. But before that, it will be appropriate to give a brief account of the ancient view of peoples who were not directly part of the Graeco-Roman world – the barbarians.

THE GRAECO-ROMAN CONCEPT OF 'BARBARIAN'

The Germani, like many other peoples, were regarded by the Romans as barbarians. This was a concept they had taken over from the Greeks. The word and concept *bárbaros* arose in ancient Greece. It is an onomatopoeic word, i.e. a word derived from the imitation of a sound. In this case it supposed to represent the sound of incomprehensible or halting speech ('babble'). Since this was what the Greeks thought came out of the mouths of people who did not speak Greek, 'barbarian' came to mean non-Greek. The Greek Herodotus from the fifth century BC was the first

to divide the world into two groups in his writings: the Greeks – or Hellenes, as they called themselves – and the non-Greeks. The Greeks were defined by their shared language, origin and religion, the non-Greeks or barbarians precisely by *not* sharing these things. Nor was it possible to change one's status from barbarian to Greek, since one could never become 'of Hellenic origin'.¹ It was the firm conviction of the Hellenes that they were superior to all others. An example of this comes from the philosopher Aristotle from the fourth century BC. In his work *The Politics*, he writes:

Those who live in a cold climate and in Europe are full of spirit, but wanting in intelligence and skill; and therefore they retain comparative freedom, but have no political organization, and are incapable of ruling over others. Whereas the natives of Asia are intelligent and inventive, but they are wanting in spirit, and therefore they are always in a state of subjection and slavery. But the Hellenic race, which is situated between them, is likewise intermediate in character, being high-spirited and also intelligent.

Aristotle: *Politics*, 7.7.1327b (Jowett)²

The Greeks were a warlike people, always fighting either with one another or with other peoples. This is very evident from Greek art, where depictions of historical or mythological struggles were popular subjects. They could be Greek peoples at war with one another; the struggle of the Lapiths with the Centaurs, creatures that were half horse, half human; Greeks battling with the Amazons; or gods warring against giants or Titans, groups who vied for power with the gods. Of course the Greeks always won (sometimes as represented by their gods), for the motif always symbolizes the victory of the Greeks, that is of the civilized, over the barbarians, whether the latter were the Persians in the fifth century BC or the Gauls in the third and second centuries BC. An example is the sculpture *The Dying Gaul* (Fig. 1), which was erected around 220 BC in Pergamon by King Attalus I after a victory over the Gauls who had immigrated to Asia Minor in 239 BC. The Gaul is shown with wild hair and a moustache, which was to become a typically barbarian appearance, but which was unthinkable for a Greek.

But let us leave the Dying Gaul lying where he is for a while and instead turn to the Romans. When

they made the acquaintance of the barbarian concept, they took over the Greek meaning of the word, which of course meant that they were themselves accounted as barbarians. But this did not last, since the Romans, we must assume, with their increasing importance in the Mediterranean area, began to consider themselves the equals of the Greeks, although the Greeks continued to have the same attitude as always. Perhaps to distance themselves from the Greek concept, and to find a concept where the Romans could be part of the centre, they began to pay more attention to how they behaved, rather than which language they spoke, and they made this the determinant of whether one was a barbarian or not. This is mentioned by the Roman politician Marcus Tullius Cicero from the first century BC:

If it is truly the case, as the Greeks say, that humankind can be divided into Greeks and barbarians, then I am afraid that Romulus ruled over barbarians. If on the other hand barbarian applies to behaviour, not to language, then the Greeks are in my view at least as much barbarians as the Romans.

Cicero: *De re publica* 1.58

Soon, in fact, the view grew up that Romans were destined to rule the whole world. It was therefore the right and duty of the Romans to conquer new land and thus to turn the uncivilized barbarians into civilized peoples under the *Pax Romana*, the Roman world peace. This is evident for example from some lines from the *Aeneid* by the poet Virgil (first century BC).

*Thou, o Roman, forget it not, shall rule.
This shall be thy art, and the law of peace thou shalt give,
Protect and guard the weak and subdue the proud.*

Virgil: *Aeneid* 6.851-3

This means that according to the Romans' concept of barbarianism one has the possibility of a change of status, since pacification of the savage barbarians will 'debarbarize' them and make them part of the civilized world.³ An example of this can be seen in Gaius Julius Caesar's account of the Gallic Wars, *De Bello Gallico*, when the Gauls come to Caesar for help against the Germanic Ariovistus:

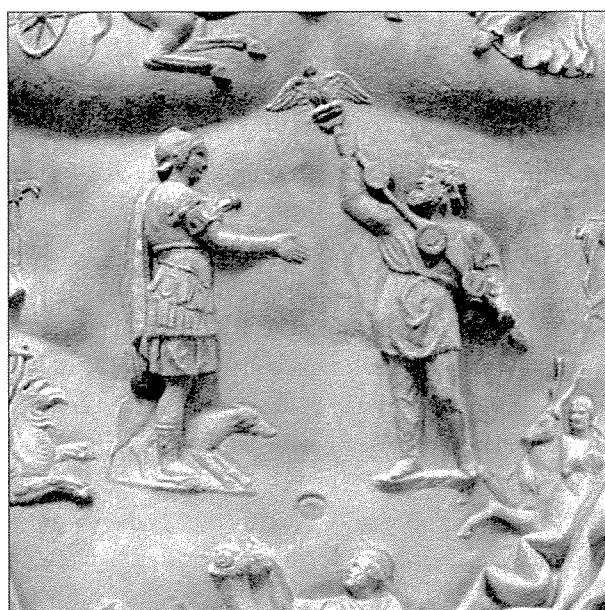


FIG. 2. The Parthian king returns a Roman eagle to a Roman officer. Detail from the statue of Augustus from Prima Porta. Photo: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.

He was an aggressive and capricious barbarian, and his abuse of power was not to be borne.

Caesar: *De Bello Gallico* 1.31.13

This is thus supposed to be a statement from the debarbarized Gauls about the barbarian Ariovistus.

Here we can return to *The Dying Gaul*. As mentioned above, this type of representation is part of the barbarian stereotype. Wild or long hair and a moustache or a large beard are thus clear signs that this is a barbarian. Since the Romans, like the Greeks, assumed that their world was perfect, alien items of clothing could also be signs of barbarianism – for example trousers or strange headgear. On the breastplate of the Augustus statue from Prima Porta we see such a representation (Fig. 2). The main motif shows two people, a Roman soldier with a dog and a man with a huge head of hair and beard dressed in trousers, handing a standard to the Roman. That he is a barbarian is evident from these very features.

Not only appearance but also behaviour and customs characterized the barbarian, since people clearly had particular expectations of barbarians. Thus we see the same stories told of different peoples and at different times.⁴ Herodotus has the following to say about the Thracians:

To be idle is accounted the most honourable thing, and to be a tiller of the ground the most dishonourable. To live by war and plunder is of all things the most glorious.

Herodotus: *Histories* 5.6.2 (Rawlinson)

The Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus says more or less the same about the Germani c. 600 years later at the end of the first century AD:

...The means of this bounty come from war and rapine. Nor are they as easily persuaded to plough the earth and to wait for the year's produce as to challenge an enemy and earn the honour of wounds. Nay, they actually think it tame and stupid to acquire by the sweat of toil what they might win by their blood. Whenever they are not fighting, they pass much of their time in the chase, and still more in idleness, giving themselves up to sleep and to feasting....

Tacitus: *Germania* 14.3 – 15.1

Thus the Romans had quite particular expectations about how a German or other barbarian should look and behave, depending on the geographical origin of the barbarian in question.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF GERMANIA AND THE LOCATIONS OF THE GERMANIC PEOPLES

All of Germania is separated from Gaul, Rhaetia and Pannonia by the rivers Rhine and Danube, from the Sarmatians and Dacians by mutual fear and mountains; the sea surrounds the rest, encompassing wide bays and immense islands ...

Tacitus: *Germania* 1 (TG)

The size of Germania, as described here in the introduction to Tacitus' work *De origine et situ Germanorum* or simply *Germania*, corresponds more or less to what most ancient geographers and ethnographers state.⁵ This work is the only one preserved which in its entirety describes Germania and the Germanic peoples (Fig. 3). It was written by Tacitus in the year 98 AD, but he was not the first to deal with the Germani.

THE LOST SOURCES

A number of works, the great majority of which are lost today, have dealt with Germania and the Germanic peoples in one way or another. Parts of the lost works have been preserved for posterity, however, through quotations and fragments found in later authors who had access to these works. Fortunately the ancient writers were in the habit of mentioning their sources. One of the first writers known to have described the more northerly regions of Europe was the Greek Pytheas, who was an astronomer, geographer and ethnographer. He sailed out in the year 325 BC from Massalia, a Greek colony in the south of France (present-day Marseilles) to explore northern Europe. Fragments of his work *On the Ocean* speak of the island of Thule, which is a six days' voyage north of Britannia, probably somewhere in Norway. He says that the local barbarians showed him where the sun goes to rest, and where the nights only last a couple of hours, while it is always very light, and

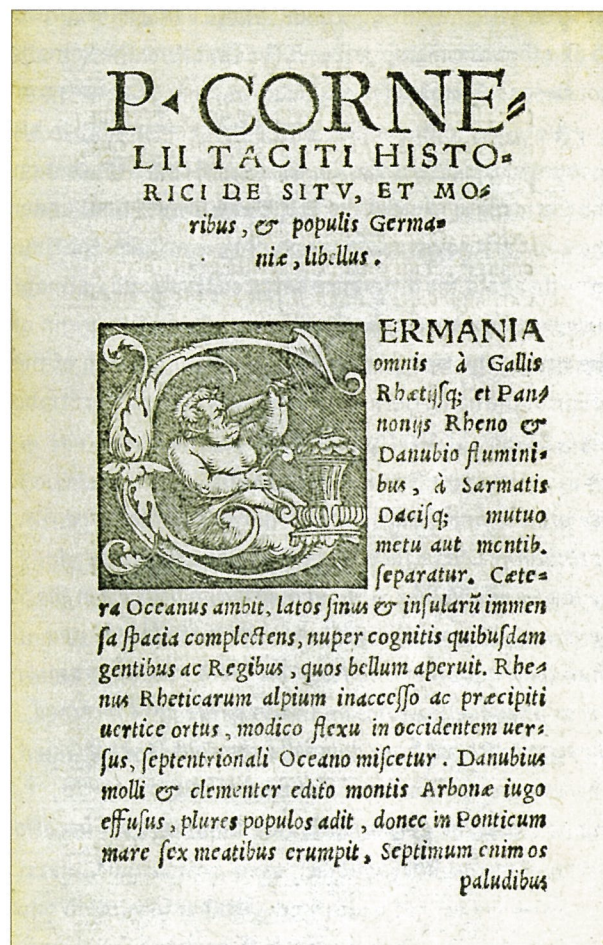


FIG. 3. First page of Tacitus' *Germania* in a version published in Wittenberg in 1538. Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen.

there is even a midnight sun. He also speaks of an 'amber island', which he calls *Abalos*, probably Heligoland in the North Sea, where there are large deposits of amber, which the natives use as fuel and sell to the Teutones, their immediate neighbours.⁶ Yet many of the later writers doubt Pytheas' fantastic tales.⁷

Among others whose works have mostly disappeared is the geographer Xenophon of Lampsacus from around 100 BC. His work, *Periplus*, which means a guide for voyagers, was an account of a voyage along the northwestern coasts of Europe. Another Greek geographer, Philemon, from the first half of the first century AD, wrote a work on seas and islands in northern Europe. These three works are known from among other sources the Roman Gaius Plinius Secundus, also called Pliny the Elder (c. 23/24-79 AD) who wrote an encyclopaedia of natural history in 37 volumes, in which he mentions them as sources.⁸ Pliny the Elder also wrote another relevant work on the Germanic Wars, the *Bella Germaniae*, in 20 volumes. This work is partly preserved through Tacitus.⁹ Another lost source is by the Roman historian Titus Livius (Livy) (59 BC-17 AD), who wrote a Roman history, *Ab urbe condita* (*From the Foundation of the City*) in 142 books. Of these only 35 books are preserved. However, extracts from the missing parts can be found in the work of a number of other authors. These include the historian and poet Lucius Annaeus Florus (first half of second century AD), whose Roman history is primarily based on Livy's. Another writer who used Livy was the Spanish presbyter Paulus Orosius (first half of the fifth century AD), who wrote *Historiae adversum paganos*, or *Seven Books of Histories against the Pagans*.¹⁰

THE MATERIAL USED BY THE ANCIENT WRITERS

The information used by the ancient writers can be divided into three categories. The first is knowledge obtained from wars. For example much of the early knowledge of Germania comes from campaigns in Germania in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. Secondly, there were reports from voyagers like Pytheas or others. These were what works like Xenophon's *Periplus* and other *periplus* were based on. Thirdly, there were traders who went into Germania and traded with the local tribes. In Pliny one can read about a Roman who was sent into Germania to buy amber. He

reached the coast and visited various markets. And he would naturally have come across other markets and peoples on his journeys back and forth through Germania.¹¹

THE NAMES 'GERMANIA' AND 'GERMANI'

The earliest example of the use of the word 'German' is from the Greek historian and ethnographer Poseidonius of Apameia. His own works are not preserved, but several fragments are known from other writers such as the Greek Athenaeus, who writes:

As Poseidonius related in his thirtieth book, the Germani eat fried pieces of meat for breakfast, and with it drink milk and unmixed wine.

Poseidonius: *Historiae*, Fragment 22

We do not know the meaning in which he used the name, but some scholars believe he was talking about a particular tribe with the name *Germani*, whose name later spread to all other 'Germanic' tribes.¹² The first time the Romans got close to Germania in earnest was during Caesar's conquest of Gaul in the middle of the first century BC. In his account of the Gallic War, Caesar several times touches on the Germani who cross the Rhine and invade Gaul under their leader Ariovistus. At one point he even takes the time to write about the difference between Gauls and Germani. However, he gets nowhere with remarks on the origin of the name. The first person to give a clear opinion of the origin of the name Germani is the Greek geographer Strabo (64/3 BC to c. 21 AD) from Amaseia in Asia Minor.

The areas immediately on the other side of the Rhine – behind the Celts – face to the east and are inhabited by the Germani, who, although differing little from the Celts, are yet more savage, taller and more fair-haired than they, but otherwise resemble them much. For as far as physique, customs and ways of life are concerned, they are quite as I have described the Celts. That is why I believe the Romans have named them Germani – to indicate that the Germani are true Galatians: for in Latin Germani means 'the genuine'.

Strabo: *Geography* 7.1.2

Here Strabo mentions Celts, Germani and 'Galatians'. This is because the Greeks divided northern Europe into Celts in the west and Scythians in the east. The Celts or Gauls who invaded Asia Minor in the 3rd-2nd centuries BC were later called Galatians. Diodorus Siculus, who as his name suggests came from Sicily, and who lived in Caesar's time in the mid-first century BC, says that the people who live between the Pyrenees and the Alps are called Celts, while the people who live beyond the Celts in the northern area that stretches to the Ocean and all the way to the land of the Scythians are called Galatians.¹³ Thus in the Greek world no great differentiation was made between Gauls and Germani, as they were all considered Celts. The orator and historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus made the following remark at the end of the first century BC:

So large is the land of the Celts that it almost accounts for a quarter of Europe. It is rich in water and fertile, rich in crops and excellently suited for cattle farming. The country is divided by the Rhine, which after the Danube appears to be the second largest river in Europe. The part that lies between the Rhine and the areas of the Scythians and the Thracians is called Germania; it stretches to the Hercynian Forest and the Ripaeae Mountains. The part that lies on the other side of the Rhine and which faces south, which reaches the Pyrenees and includes the Gulf of Galatia, is called Galatia as far as the sea. In Greek the whole area is referred to with the common designation 'Keltike' ...

Dionysius of Halicarnassus:
Antiquitates Romanae 14.1.2-4 (JH/TG)

In the third century AD the civil servant Cassius Dio Cocceianus (normally known as Dio Cassius) says in his *History of Rome*, in connection with a description of the Rhine, that the population on the left-hand side are called 'Galatians' (Gauls) and on the right-hand side 'Celts' (meaning Germani), while in very ancient times they were all called Celts.¹⁴

Another writer who mentions the origin of the name is Tacitus. He says of Germania:

The name Germania is moreover said to be modern and recently introduced, since the first to cross the Rhine and drive out the Gauls, now called the Tungri, were then called Germani. It is thus said to be the name of a

particular place of origin [natio], not of the whole race [gens], that has gradually prevailed, such that they were all at first called Germani to inspire fear [ob metum] by the victor, and then they called themselves by this invented name.

Tacitus: *Germania* 2.3

From this it is evident that Tacitus had a different view of the origin of the name than Strabo had c. 100 years before. But from both reports one can infer that the name was not originally used by the Germani themselves.

GERMANIA IN THE TIME AROUND THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

As mentioned above, Julius Caesar was the first to deal in any detail with the Germani. Livy too gave an account of the Germani in his work *Ab urbe condita*. But this account has unfortunately been lost. However, some fragments are preserved in Florus and Orosius concerning the campaigns of the general Drusus in Germania in 15 and 12-9 BC.¹⁵ Caesar's adopted son and successor, the first Roman Emperor Augustus, who ruled from 31 BC until his death in 14 AD, also provides important information about Germania in a list of his deeds for Rome. One of the most careful sources, though, is Strabo, who describes Germanic geography and ethnography in his *Geography*. The last source from the time around the birth of Christ is Gaius Velleius Paterculus (20 BC–30 AD) from the southern Italian city of Capua. As a source he is particularly interesting, since he was an officer serving under Tiberius on the latter's campaigns in Germania. Shortly before he died he wrote a *Historia Romana*. He gives no general account of Germania, but mentions tribes and areas in connection with the campaigns he describes (Fig. 4).

Caesar

Caesar does not deal with the geography of Germania as such; he only mentions the "forest called Bacenis", which separates the Cherusci from the Suebi, and the Hercynian mountain range and forest. This, he says, is so large that no one from "this part of Germania", even though he may have travelled for 60 days, has seen the beginning of it or even heard where it begins. The forest was said to extend

from the area of the Helvetii (i.e. Switzerland) along the Danube and on towards Dacia (present-day Romania), where it turns off towards the north.¹⁶ He mentions only a few Germanic tribes. On the western side of the Rhine live the Condrusi, the Eburones, the Caeraesi and the Paemani, who are called by the common name of Germani. He devotes most space – a whole section of his account of the Gallic War – to the Suebi. Other tribes are almost always mentioned in some relationship with the Suebi, such as the Cherusci above or the Usipetes and Tencteri, who crossed the Rhine, forced out by the Suebi, or the Ubii, who succeeded in resisting the pressure from the Suebi, but who instead had to pay tribute to them.¹⁷

Livy

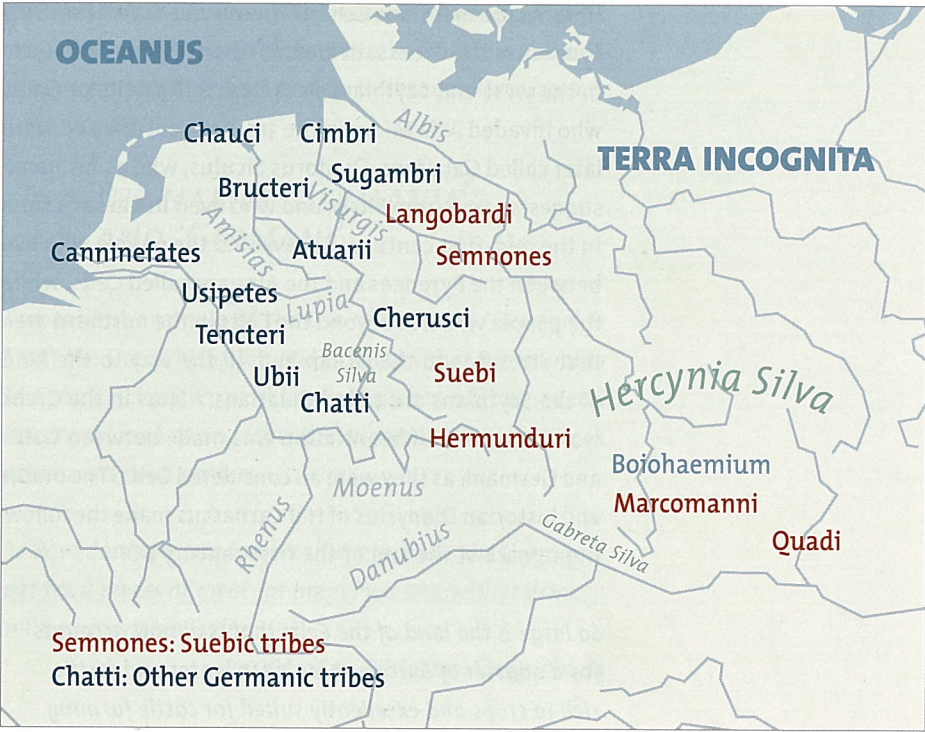
Almost identical passages from Livy’s work are preserved in Florus and Orosius. They say that Drusus first defeated the Usipetes, then the Tencteri and Chatti. After he had almost wiped out the Marcomanni, it was the turn of the Cherusci, Suebi and Sugambri. Then Florus mentions that Drusus gained access to the Hercynian Forest, which the Romans had not yet seen, let alone entered.¹⁸

Augustus

At his mausoleum in Rome, Augustus set up two bronze plaques where his deeds were set out in 35 chapters. Copies of this text were also set up in other places, for example in what is now Ankara in Turkey, where a version was found in 1555. The text is sometimes called *Monumentum Ancyranum* after the find-spot, sometimes *Res gestae divi Augusti* (*The Deeds of the Divine Augustus*). Chapter 26 is about how Augustus extended the borders of the empire. It says of Germania:

I have brought peace to the provinces of Spain and Gaul, and Germania, the areas surrounded by the Ocean from Gades [Cadiz in Spain] to the mouth of the Elbe....My fleet has sailed over the Ocean from the mouth of the Rhine eastward all the way to the land of the Cimbri, where no Roman before that time had reached, either by land or by sea, and the Cimbri, Charydes and Semnones and the other Germanic peoples in the same area asked for my friendship and that of the Romans through envoys.

Augustus: *Res gestae* 26.2.4 (TG)



Strabo

Strabo mentions the Rhine and the Ocean, the western and northern limits of Germania, and like Caesar touches on the Hercynian mountain range, which he calls ‘forest-clad’; but he also mentions another great forest, the ‘Gabreta Forest’. Among rivers he mentions, besides the Rhine and Danube, the Elbe, Weser and Ems, which flow into the Ocean; the Lippe, which flows into the Rhine; and the Saale, which is a branch of the Elbe. He speaks of a lake, probably Lake Constance, near the sources of the Rhine and Donau. Like Caesar he singles out the Suebi among the Germanic peoples. They are the largest group, since their territory stretches from the Rhine to the Elbe, including part of the Hercynian Forest. But the Suebi are not one tribe but many, the most important of which are the Marcomanni, the Quadi, the Semnones, a mighty tribe compared with the other Suebian tribes, the Hermunduri and the Langobardi. Strabo says that the last two tribes mentioned originally lived east of the Elbe, but were driven over to the other side. Other tribes mentioned include the Cherusci and Chatti, and along the Ocean the Sugambri, Bructeri, Cimbri and Chauci.¹⁹ Strabo ends by clarifying the knowledge available to him about northern Germania:

FIG. 4. Map 1: Germania in the time around the birth of Christ.

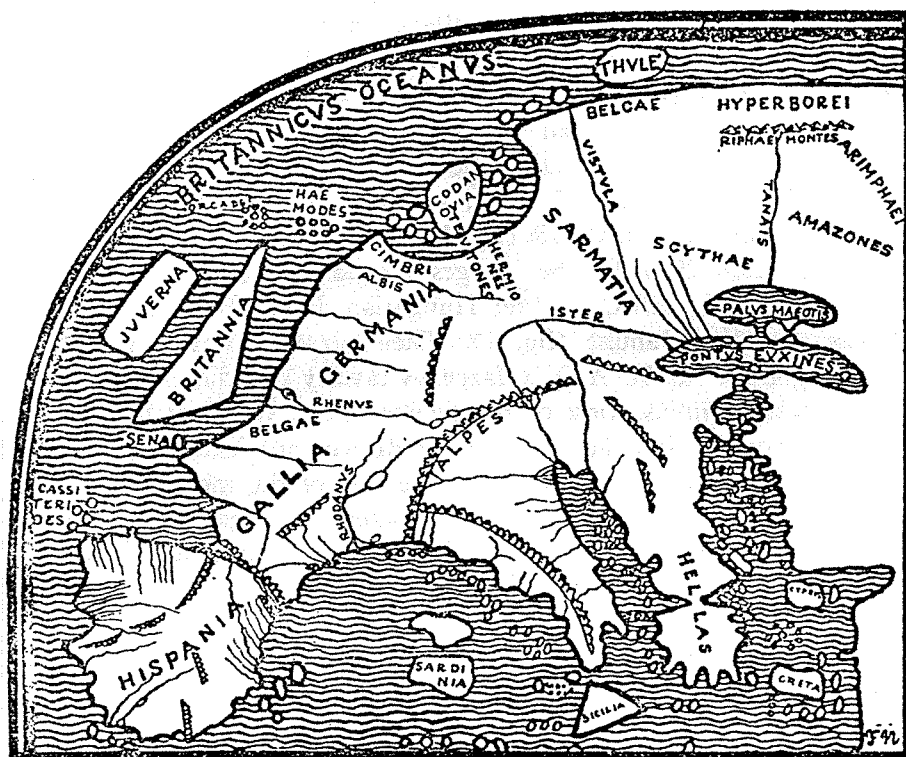
The northern Germans live, as I have said, along the Ocean. They are known from the mouth of the Rhine to the Elbe. The best known of them are the Sugambri and the Cimbri. However, the areas beyond the Elbe along the Ocean are completely unknown to us.

Strabo: Geography 7.2.4

Velleius Paterculus

In connection with the Roman campaigns, Paterculus says that after the march into Germania the Canninefates, the Attuari, the Bructeri and the Cherusci were conquered before the Weser was crossed. The following year saw the defeat of the Chauci and the Langobardi, a tribe Paterculus calls more savage than the most savage Germani. After this the mouth of the Elbe was at last reached, something that, according to Paterculus, they had earlier not even hoped to do. This river flowed past the areas of the Semnones and the Hermunduri. The fleet, which in the meantime had sailed through the bays of the Ocean in waters that had hitherto been totally unknown, sailed up the Elbe and was united with the army after defeating many peoples. After this there were no others to be conquered in Germania than the Marcomanni, who had moved away from the Ro-

FIG. 5. Europe according to Pomponius Mela. After Sulimirski 1964.



mans and now inhabited the area *Boiohaemum* (Bohemia), which was surrounded by the Hercynian Forest.²⁰

GERMANIA FROM THE MIDDLE TO THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY AD

The middle of the first century AD added new information to the Roman knowledge of Germania. This came for example from Pomponius Mela of Spain, the oldest Roman geographer whose work is preserved. In his work *De Chorographia* from 43/44 AD he contributes a number of items of information about the situation in northern Germania, but his other information is often out of date.²¹ Another important source from this period is Pliny the Elder. In his encyclopaedia of the natural sciences, which he finished in the year of his death 79 AD, he also deals with the geography and ethnography of Germania. Pliny was in Germania in 47 AD as a cavalry officer and could thus offer his own experiences. The all-overshadowing source, however, is Tacitus' *Germania* from 98 AD.

Pomponius Mela

The borders of Germania in Pomponius Mela are by and large as in most other authors: the Rhine in the west, the Alps in the south, the Ocean in the north and the Sarmatian tribes in the east, separated from the Germani by the River Weichsel. He further mentions a number of rivers and mountains. Of the Hercynian Forest he reports that it is a 60 days' march long. He also says that the country is inaccessible, rough and trackless because of the many rivers, mountains and swamps.²² Besides some mythical peoples such as the Oiones, who live only on eggs, the Hippopodes, who have horses' hooves, and the Panotii, who instead of clothes have ears that cover their whole body, he only mentions the Cimbri and the Teutones, who live by the Ocean, and on the other side of them the Hermiones as the last tribe.²³ The area where Pomponius Mela really contributes something new is the description of the Ocean. This description is however so ambivalent that it is difficult to interpret precisely what he is talking about. He mentions the 'Codan Bay' which is above the Elbe. It is full of large and small islands. The sea therefore resembles a river which runs between the islands and sometimes floods over them.

Between the coast and the islands the sea forms a kind of belt that winds and stretches in a long curve, where the Cimbri and Teutones live.²⁴ This is very much a description of the Wadden Sea, the shallow coastal waters in the North Sea. Later he again mentions the 'Codan Bay'. First he mentions two island groups. One is the 'Orcadian islands', 30 in number, which are thought to be the Orkneys.²⁵ The other is the 'Hæmodes', consisting of seven islands facing Germania.²⁶ One text version indicates that they are in the Codan Bay, and that the biggest and most fertile of them is the island of *Codanovia*, which is inhabited by the Teutones.²⁷ Another text version says in one sentence that the Hæmodes are opposite Germania and in the next sentence that in the Codan Bay it is first and foremost *Scadinavia* that should be singled out. This is inhabited by the Teutones and exceeds the other islands in both size and fertility.²⁸ *Codanovia* and *Scadinavia* are thus the same island. Since this 'island' is usually thought to be modern Scania, the other description of the Codan Bay must be of the Baltic. Since the situation from the first description does not fit the Baltic, there are several possible solutions to the location of the Codan Bay. One is that Codan stretches from the Wadden Sea in the North Sea north around Jutland and down to the Baltic, where it encompasses the Danish islands and Scania, which people thus must have thought was an island. Another solution is that Pomponius Mela is confusing different descriptions and thus makes a modern interpretation difficult (Fig. 5).²⁹

Pliny the Elder

According to Pliny the Elder the Germanic peoples can be divided into five groups:

1. The Vandilii, among whom are counted the Burgundi, Varini, Charini and Gutones.
2. The Ingaevones, who consist of the Cimbri, Teutones and Chauci.
3. The Istaevones, who live by the Rhine. At this point it appears that there is a lacuna in the text, since no tribes are named; but later Pliny mentions the Batavii, the Canninefates, the Frisii, the Chauci, who can be subdivided into the minor and the major Chauci, the Frisiavones, the Sturii and the Marsaci, who live between the different mouths of the Rhine. Except for the Chauci, whom he also

mentions in Group 2, these tribes could thus belong under the Istaevones.

4. In the middle the Hermiones, who consist of the Suebi, the Hermunduri, the Chatti and the Cherusci.
5. The last group is made up of the Peucini and the Bastarni. Elsewhere Pliny mentions the Germanic tribes who live west of the Rhine: the Nemetes, Tribocci, Vangiones, Ubii, Guberni, Batavii and other tribes, which he has located between the mouths of the Rhine.³⁰ Of the area where the Ingaevones live (Fig. 6), i.e. northern Germania, Pliny writes:

There the Saevo mountain, which is immense and no smaller than the Ripaeen mountains, equal to the Cimbrian promontory, forms a mighty bay in the sea, which is called the Codan Bay, which is full of islands, of which the most famous is Scatinavia, an island of still unknown size. The part that is known is populated by the Hilleviones, who occupy 500 villages: therefore the island is called another world. Aeningia is presumably no smaller.

Pliny the Elder: *Naturalis Historia* 4,96

FIG. 6. Map 2: Northern Germania according to Pliny the Elder.

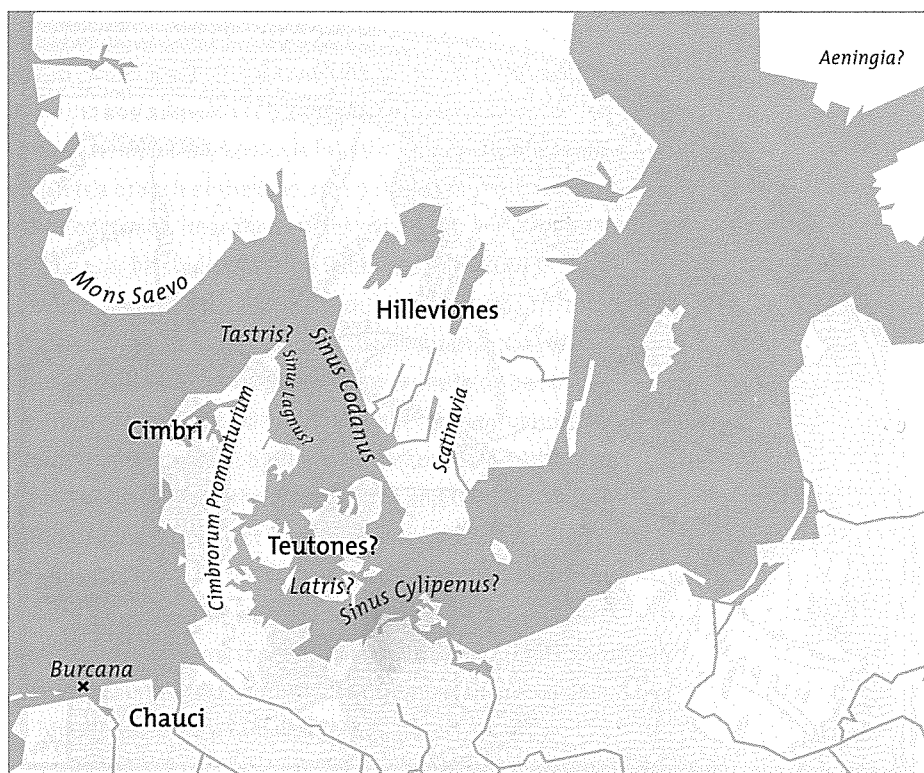


FIG. 7. Map 3: Germania according to Tacitus.



It is generally accepted that the *Saevo* mountain must be the south coast of Norway, while the Codan Bay, as was also evident from Pomponius Mela's account, must be the waters stretching at least from the Skagerrak down to the Baltic. The Cimbrian promontory is Jutland.³¹ As mentioned before, *Scatinavia* should be Scania, while some believe *Aeningia*, which is not further described, to be Finland.³² Later Pliny mentions some other bays: the Cylipene Bay, in which the island of *Latris* lies, and the Lagnus Bay, which lies adjacent to the Cimbrian promontory, which extends far out into the sea and forms the peninsula called *Tastris*. It is of course as difficult to identify these place names as the preceding ones. One suggestion is that the Cylipene Bay is the Kattegat or the Baltic and *Latris* is Sealand or Lolland, while the Lagnus Bay is the waters along the east coast of Jutland and *Tastris* is Skagen.³³ Another suggestion is that these places are on the western part of the German Baltic coast.³⁴

Through the Roman army Pliny knows of 23 islands (the Frisian Wadden Sea islands), of which the most important is *Burcana*, also called *Fabaria* or the Bean Island

because of the many wild beans. Because of the large deposits of amber the Roman soldiers, however, call the island *Glaesaria* after '*glesum*,' the Germanic word for amber, while by the Germani it is called *Austeravia* or *Actania*. Pliny also uses the names *Fabariae*, the Bean Islands and *Glaesariae*, the Amber Islands, in the plural form.³⁵

Tacitus

No other writer investigated the Germanic peoples and areas more than the historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus. Tacitus is considered one of the greatest historians of antiquity, both for his sober presentation of the events, which however still reveals who Tacitus feels sympathy for, and for his literary style, as manifested by his outstanding treatment of the Latin language. His principal works are the *Annales* and *Historiae*, which deal respectively with the period from the death of Augustus in the year 14 AD to that of Nero in the year 68 AD, and the reigns of the Flavian emperors (69-96 AD). But first he wrote two minor works. One of these, the *Agricola*, was about the Roman general

Julius Agricola, the principal figure behind the conquest of Britain – he was incidentally Tacitus' father-in-law. The other work is *De origine et situ Germanorum* or *Germania*, which will be described in more detail here.

Of the origin of the Germani, Tacitus says that in their ancient hymns they sing the praises of the god Tuisto, whose son Mannus is the progenitor of the Germani. After his three sons the tribes who live near the Ocean are called Ingaevones, those who live inland are called the Herminones and the remainder are called the Istaevones. Some claim, according to Tacitus, that there are also other older tribes such as the Marsi, Gambrivii, Suebi and Vandilii, said to be genuine old names.³⁶ After first giving an account of the common origins and customs of the Germani, Tacitus goes on to describe the individual tribes. Unlike other writers Tacitus does much to point out peculiarities and distinctive features of the different tribes (Fig. 7).³⁷ Some tribes are even given special mention, for example the Batavii, who are singled out for their bravery. This tribe is not subject to tributes, only kept in readiness for war.³⁸ Another noteworthy tribe is the Chatti, who live in the Hercynian mountains. Here Tacitus gives us an excellent example of the way the Romans thought that geographical conditions had a strong influence on the population. For throughout their territory the Chatti are followed by the Hercynian mountain country.

This people is distinguished with bodies more hardy and robust, compact limbs, stern countenances, and greater vigour of intellect. For Germani, they are men of much sense and initiative.

Tacitus: *Germania* 30.2

He further notes the rational approach of the Chatti to warfare and discipline, which in reality reflects on the Romans themselves. For in the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD), this particular Germanic tribe was conquered.³⁹ Then he writes of the Tencteri, who excel in horsemanship.⁴⁰ After this Tacitus mentions a number of less important tribes before continuing to the Chauci. This people is described almost as having a calm, peace-loving temperament, not given to plunder or raids.⁴¹ That is a very interesting item of information, when in his *Annales* Tacitus says of these very Chauci that they are responsible for one pirate attack after another.⁴² Of the Cimbri Tacitus says they were once a huge people, but



FIG. 8. Skull from Osterby Bog with Suebian topknot. Photo: Stiftung Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesmuseen Schloss Gottorf.

are now insignificant and only enjoy some esteem that stems from their former greatness.⁴³ Most of Germania is inhabited by the people who call themselves Suebi. These, as mentioned before, consist of a multitude of tribes, according to Tacitus around 25. He begins his account of the Suebi by speaking of their distinctive mark, the Suebian topknot (Fig. 8).

This people is remarkable for a peculiar custom, that of twisting their hair and binding it up in a topknot. This is how the Suebi are distinguished from the other Germani, and the free Suebi from their slaves. In other nations, whether from blood kinship with the Suebi, or, as is usual, from imitation, this practice is also found, although rarely, and never beyond the years of youth. The Suebi, even when their hair is white through age, continue to raise it backwards in a manner stern and striking; and they often tie it only at the top of their heads.

Tacitus: *Germania* 38.2-3

The Semnones are the first Suebian tribe to be mentioned. They consider themselves the oldest and most eminent of the Suebi, and because of their huge size they also consider themselves the principal tribe of the Suebi.⁴⁴ The Reudigni, Aviones, Anglii, Varini, Eudoses, Suardones and Nuithones, who live protected by rivers and forests, are

all linked by their worship of Nerthus, a fertility goddess. Her sanctuary is a sacred grove which is situated on an island out in the Ocean.⁴⁵ For that reason, and because these tribes are mentioned just after the Langobardi, said to live in the area around the lower Elbe, these 'Nerthus peoples' have been located in Schleswig-Holstein, Jutland and the Danish islands.⁴⁶ The Hermunduri, who live by the Danube, Tacitus says, are loyal to the Romans. This is why the Hermunduri are the only Germani to be permitted to come freely into the Roman province of Rhaetia to trade, while the other Germani are only allowed to see the Roman weapons and fortresses.⁴⁷

Next come the communities of the Suiones, situated in the Ocean itself; and besides their strength in men and arms, they are very powerful at sea. The form of their vessels varies thus far from ours, that they have prows at each end, so as to be always ready to row ashore without turning;

nor are they moved by sails, nor do they have banks of oars on their sides, but the rowers work here and there and in all parts of the ship, as is done in some rivers, and change their oars from place to place, just as they shift their course hither or thither. (Fig. 9) To wealth also, amongst them, great veneration is paid, and thence a single ruler governs them, without any restriction of power, and he exacts unlimited obedience. Nor are weapons, as amongst other nations of Germany, used indifferently by all, but they are shut up and guarded by a particular keeper, who is in fact always a slave: since the ocean protects them from all sudden invasions and attacks; besides the fact that armed bands, when they are not employed, easily grow debauched and tumultuous. The truth is, it is not in the interest of an arbitrary prince to trust the care and power of arms to either a nobleman or a freeman, or indeed to any man above the status of a slave.

Tacitus: Germania 44.2-3

FIG. 9. Reconstruction of the Nydam Boat. Drawing by Magnus Petersen from 1863. National Museum.



It is the general view that the 'island' inhabited by the Suiones is Sweden, since the Romans are thought to have viewed the Scandinavian Peninsula as an island. Some even think that the territory of the Suiones should be located in a central Swedish region like Svealand or Uppland, and that they gave their name to the Swedes. Tacitus is presumed to have obtained this information by way of the trade route from the Danube along the Weichsel to the Baltic.⁴⁸ On the other side of the Suiones there is another ocean which almost motionlessly encompasses the earth.⁴⁹ Tacitus calls the Baltic the Suebian Sea, whose right (i.e. eastern) shore is inhabited by the Aestian tribes, who gather amber.⁵⁰ As one can see from the above, it was the Germanic peoples who attracted Tacitus' main interest, His view of the Germanic landscape can be seen clearly from a brief general description.

Their country, though somewhat various in appearance, yet generally either bristles with forests or reeks with

swamps; it is more rainy on the side of Gaul, bleaker on that of Noricum and Pannonia.

Tacitus: *Germania* 5.1

But he is stingy with geographical information. Of course he mentions various rivers, forests and mountains and so on, but gives no important information beyond what Pliny and the other earlier writers have said.

GERMANIA IN THE MID-SECOND CENTURY AD

Ptolemy

Klaudios Ptolemaios ('Ptolemy') was a scholar of Alexandria who lived c. 85-165 AD. He wrote works on astronomy, astrology, epistemology and geography. His 'Guide to Geography', *Geographikè Hyphégesis*, in eight books has had a crucial influence on the cartography of later times. The

FIG. 11. First page of Ptolemy's description of Germania. Edition from 1466 by Nicolaus Germanicus. Photo: Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli/Massimo Velo.



FIG. 10. Germania according to Ptolemy's account. Edition from 1466 by Nicolaus Germanicus. Photo: Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli/Massimo Velo.

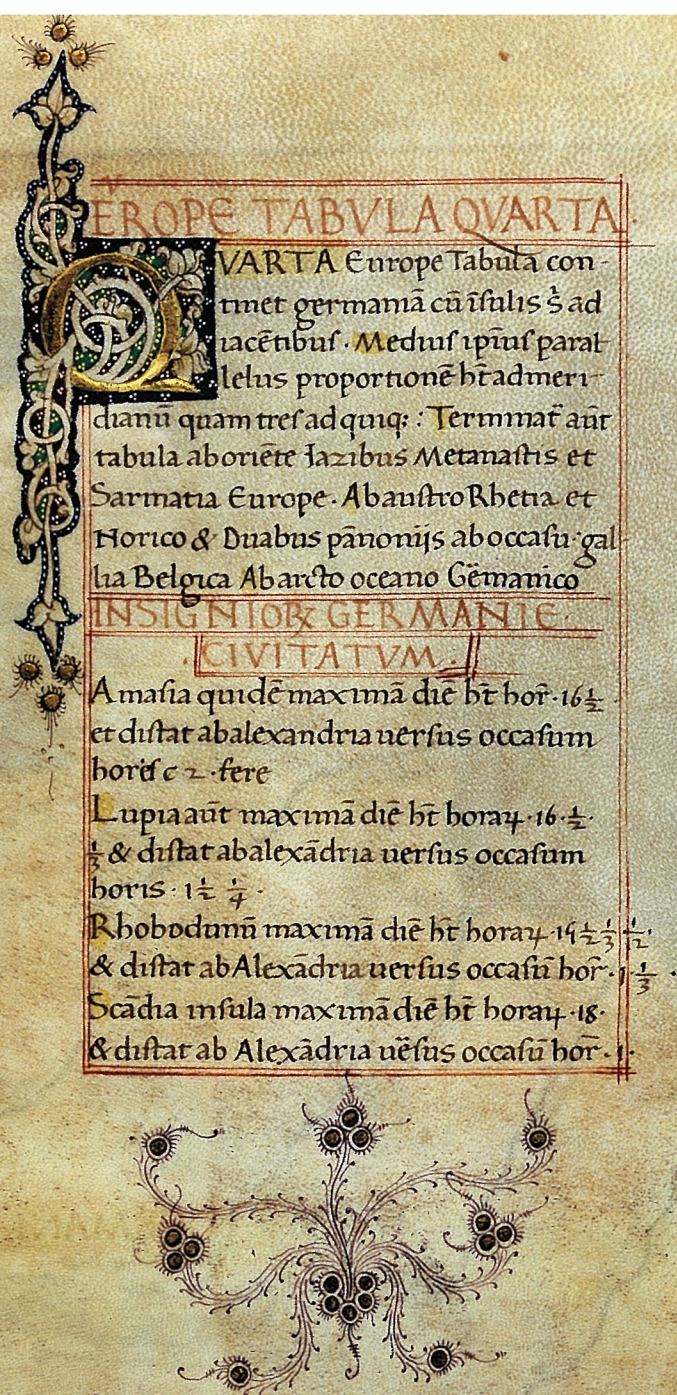


FIG. 12. Germania according
 to Ptolemy's system of coordi-
 nates. a) Map 4: Tribes. b) Map
 5: Towns.

work begins with an introduction to the theoretical prin-
 ciples behind making a map, and the technical differences
 between making a map of the world and making a regional
 map. Then he describes the known world area by area.
 He ends the work with more theoretical considerations.
 The bulk of the work, including the regional descriptions,

was probably written in the years 135-142 AD.⁵¹ In Book
 Two, Chapter 11, Ptolemy describes barbarian Germania
 (Fig. 10). First he provides a number of coordinates for
 geographical features such as mountains, the sources
 and mouths of rivers, coasts and islands (Fig. 11). Then he
 describes the locations of the various Germanic tribes in
 relation to one another (Fig. 12a). Finally he again provides
 a number of coordinates, this time for what he describes
 as 'towns', which must be considered to mean settlements,
 trading places and the like (Fig. 12b).⁵² With a total of 68
 tribal names and 95 place names, Ptolemy's description
 of Germania is the most detailed we know, but the many
 names do not necessarily make the interpretation easier.
 In his account Germania extends c. 1 degree too far to the
 south and 2 degrees too far to the north. Furthermore, som
 locations have been displaced in relation to one another.
 Jutland for example leans c. 45 degrees to the east. This is
 because Ptolemy's information came from various seafar-
 ers and traders who sometimes perhaps gave descriptions
 in different languages of the same places, with different
 results. This could have caused misinterpretations or pos-
 sibly meant that the same place appeared several times
 under different names.⁵³ Another demonstrable error
 can be found in the listing of the place names, where the
 first place Ptolemy mentions is *Fleum*, according to the
 coordinates corresponding to the earlier Roman fortress
Flevum, which lay north of the mouth of the Rhine. The
 next place, just a little south east of *Fleum*, is called *Sia-
 tutanda*.⁵⁴ Ptolemy's source for these place names must
 have been in Latin, since he uses the Latin ending -um
 in *Fleum* and not the Greek -on. In the year 21 AD *Flevum*
 was besieged by the Frisians, in whose area the fortress
 lay. Ptolemy had read this in Tacitus' *Annales*, which has
 a reference to the fortress as *castello, cui nomen Flevum*,
 'a fortress the name of which is Flevum', and an account
 of the events that took place there. Among other things
 Tacitus says that when Roman reinforcements approached
 the rebels drew back to protect their own possessions (*ad
 sua tutanda regressis rebellibus*).⁵⁵ Ptolemy has understood
 this to mean that the rebels drew back to 'sua tutanda'
 or 'Siatutanda', which he thought was a place. Of course
 it can be difficult to interpret the information one gets
 from Ptolemy, and to purge it of any errors. But the same
 applies to all ancient sources. In Ptolemy's case it is simply
 often easier to discover the errors, since his information
 is so systematically presented.



One area about which Ptolemy contributes useful information is the North. He gives the coordinates of the Cimbrian Peninsula, that is Jutland, presumably with Schleswig-Holstein.⁵⁶ He also provides a central coordinate for three times three islands surrounding Jutland: first the 'Saxon islands' west of Jutland; then the 'Alocian islands' north of Jutland; and finally the 'smaller Scandian islands' east of Jutland. Farther east from the three smaller Scandian islands lies the large Scandian island, which is also simply called Scandia. Here Ptolemy provides a western, eastern, northern and southern coordinate.⁵⁷ This island is said to be more or less above the mouth of the River Weichsel. Of the tribes Ptolemy writes:

The peninsula itself [Jutland] above the Saxons, is inhabited by the Sigulones in the west, then the Sabalingi, then the Cobandes; above these the Chales, farther above them and more to the west the Funusii; east of this the Charudes; and northernmost of all the Cimbri.

Ptolemy: *Geographikè Hyphégesis* 2.11.7 (JH/TG)

And of Scandia:

In the west the island is inhabited by the Chaideini, in the east by the Favona and the Firaisi, in the north by the Finns, in the south by the Goutii and the Dauciones, in the middle by the Leuoni.

Ptolemy: *Geographikè Hyphégesis* 2.11.16 (JH/TG)

As pointed out above, the Cimbrian Peninsula erroneously leans c. 45 degrees to the east. In addition some people think that Funen was included, because if one comes from the north one could easily think that Funen is part of Jutland.⁵⁸ As was the case with *Scatinavia* above, *Scandia* is identified with Scania and the Swedish peninsula, except that the island has been placed a little too far to the east.⁵⁹ The 'smaller Scandian islands' have therefore been identified as Sealand, Langeland and Lolland,⁶⁰ or as Sealand, Lolland and Falster,⁶¹ or more cautiously simply as the Danish islands.⁶² The 'Saxon islands' are thought to be the North Frisian Wadden Sea islands, while the 'Alocian islands' are said to be the deep southern Norwegian fjords and fells, which gave the impression of being islands.⁶³ As for the tribes said to live on the Cimbrian Peninsula, almost all of them can be explained against the background of the information from Tacitus.⁶⁴ Attempts have also been

made to explain the tribes that inhabit *Scandia*. The Finns are thought to have been settled in northern Sweden and to be identical to the Lapps or Finns, while the Goutii are said to be from Götaland in central Sweden.⁶⁵ While some researchers do not think a reasonable interpretation can be given of the remaining tribes,⁶⁶ others make the attempt. For example the Chaideini are identified with the southern Norwegian tribe *Hei(ð)nir*, from the area Hedemarken north of Oslo.⁶⁷ 'Leuoni' is thought in reality to be an error for 'Suiones', of whom one hears in Tacitus, as a result of miscopyings of manuscripts. In the same work the Hilleviones of Pliny are interpreted as a miscopying of '*illa svionum gente*' ('that people the Suiones'). Among these the Suiones are said to be the genuine ones and to be the origin of the Swedes.⁶⁸ The Dauciones could be the Danes, while the Favona and Firaisi must certainly have inhabited Finland.⁶⁹ Thus *Scandia* ends up in this interpretation as not only Scania or the Swedish Peninsula, but the whole Scandinavian Peninsula, including Finland and Norway.

THE NORTH AMONG THE ANCIENT AUTHORS

Let us sum up the information the ancient writers have handed down about the North and how they have been interpreted in our own time. The most important places mentioned are the Cimbrian Peninsula and *Codanovia/Scatinavia/Scandia*, said respectively to be Jutland with Schleswig-Holstein and Scania or Sweden. Neither of these interpretations appears to pose any problems. But if one subjects *Codanovia/Scatinavia/Scandia* to closer scrutiny, one should come to the conclusion that everything is not so clear. In the table below we see what the various writers have to say about this island and its population.

But if *Codanovia/Scatinavia/Scandia* is not the Swedish Peninsula, there is only one alternative, and that is Sealand, which is the biggest true island in this area. But Sealand is not even considered, or at best as one of the smaller Scandian islands, since the Romans are said only to have had vague notions of the Danish islands.⁷⁰ One argument for Sealand is that it is in fact an island. If one looks at Tacitus' description of the tribal federation of the Suiones, it is a description of an island society. It is therefore difficult to place the Suiones in central Sweden on the assumption that Tacitus *believed* that the Swedish

TABLE 1: The ancient authors' descriptions of Codanovia/Scatinavia/Scandia.

AUTHOR	SIZE AND LOCATION	POPULATION
Pomponius Mela	The largest and most fertile island in the Codan Bay.	Teutones
Pliny the Elder	The most famous island in the Codan Bay, of unknown size.	Hilleviones, in 500 villages
Tacitus	Does not mention the place by name. Thought to be an island, because the Ocean protects it from surprise attacks.	The tribal league of the Suiones.
Ptolemy	The largest of four islands, located opposite the mouth of the River Weichsel.	Cheideini, Favona, Firaisi, Finns, Goutii, Dauciones, Leuoni

Peninsula was an island. Against the background of the very thorough description, one must assume that Tacitus' source in the final analysis was someone who had been in contact with or possibly belonged to the society in question. This person would hardly have been in any doubt as to whether the Suiones lived on an island.

One argument in favour of Roman knowledge of Sealand comes from the archaeological data. For against the background of the archaeological material it has been possible to conclude that Roman imported goods in the North and in the Baltic area from the middle of the second to the end of the fourth century AD were primarily distributed through the so-called 'Himlingøje dynasty' on Stevns.⁷¹ There is much to indicate that this power factor had control of the whole present-day and earlier Danish area. The Romans would certainly have known where such a trading partner lived. By contrast the archaeological material for Scania in this period is very meagre.⁷² Tacitus was of course writing some fifty years earlier, but the Stevns dynasty may well have been growing in power even before Tacitus wrote *Germania*.

Similarly one can discuss Ptolemy's placing of *Scandia*. He gives four coordinates for this island. This, it is said, is because he was not aware of the actual size of the 'island'. In that case it is odd that the stated size relative to

the Cimbrian Peninsula more or less matches the relative sizes of Sealand and Jutland. Furthermore, this island is said to have been opposite the mouth of the Weichsel, yet not even Scania lies there – but this could be attributed to one of Ptolemy's many errors.

One could of course also find arguments against this interpretation. Pliny says that the population of the island *Scatinavia*, the Hilleviones, occupy 500 villages, which is why the island is called 'another world'. But is Sealand big enough for that? If we look at the distribution of burials and settlements on Sealand in the Roman Iron Age there are up to a couple of hundred known sites.⁷³

If Sealand was *Codanovia/Scatinavia/Scandia*, what was Scania/Sweden then called? One possibility is the *Aeningia* mentioned by Pliny, about which there is not much more to say than that it is approximately as large as *Scatinavia*. Whereas this comparison is normally taken to be between Sweden and Finland, it could be between Sealand and Scania. Another problem is making room for all the peoples that Ptolemy places in *Scandia*. As will be evident from the above, it can be difficult to infer anything specific from the written sources. Some arguments are supported by palaeographic analyses, while others are supported by archaeological analyses. In none of the cases, though, are the arguments so watertight that it will not in the final analysis be a personal view that determines which side one leans to.

GERMANIC CUSTOMS AND MANNERS

Appearance

As mentioned above, it was expected that a barbarian had wild-growing hair and a beard; but beyond this there were also particular ideas about the rest of the physical appearance of the barbarians, as here in Tacitus' description of 'the Germani'.

All have fierce blue eyes, red hair, huge frames, fit only for a sudden exertion. They are less able to bear laborious work. Heat and thirst they cannot in the least endure; to cold and hunger their climate and their soil inure them.

Tacitus: *Germania* 4

This information would have come as no surprise to Tacitus' readers, since it is quite in keeping with the age's view of how mankind was influenced by natural surroundings. The architect Vitruvius, who lived in the time of Augustus around the birth of Christ, writes for example thus of the inhabitants of the North:

But, on the other hand, in the cold regions that are far away from the south, the moisture is not drawn out by hot weather, but the atmosphere is full of dampness which diffuses moisture into the system, and makes the frame larger and the pitch of the voice deeper. This is also the reason why the races that are bred in the north are of vast height, and have fair complexions, straight red hair, grey eyes, and a great deal of blood, owing to the abundance of moisture and the coolness of the atmosphere. ... [But it also means that] men that are born in the north are rendered over-timid and weak by fever, but their wealth of blood enables them to stand up against the sword without timidity.

Vitruvius: *De Architectura* 6.1.3-4 (Morgan)

Lifestyle

According to the Roman writers war and battle were the most important features in the life of the Germani. For example it was considered very honourable to create a kind of no-man's land, a desolate, uninhabited area around the territory of a tribe.⁷⁴ Other occupations such as farming and hunting were only necessary evils to which they assigned no spiritual value. The bravest of them did not even engage in these things at all, but left them to women, children and the infirm.⁷⁵ The Germani 'did nothing without weapons', and excellence in the arts of war, whether in war or in sport, was the finest thing they could imagine. In games they could become so blinded by their passion for gambling that they could end up gambling away their freedom.⁷⁶ Their military leader was chosen for his valour. In battle he would be disgraced if he was outdone in bravery, while the others were dishonoured if they were not as brave as the leader.⁷⁷ The young rallied to the foremost warriors, and became a kind of retainers. The various groups of retainers competed for the favour of the leader. The size of these companies of young men also added to the reputation of a warrior both among his own tribe and among the neighbouring tribes.⁷⁸

Something very important to the Germani was omens and the casting of oracular lots. The way this functioned was that the priest of the tribe spread a number of small sticks with carved tokens at random on a white cloth. Then he called upon the gods, and with his face towards heaven he took up three sticks, and interpreted them. If he arrived at a favourable interpretation he sought further confirmation in bird auguries; otherwise they did no more that day.⁷⁹ Caesar recounts from his battles with the Germanic Ariovistus that he could not get the Germani to fight the decisive battle. When he then questioned some prisoners-of-war to find the reason for this, they told him that the casting of lots and omens had dictated that Ariovistus should delay the crucial battle until after the new moon.⁸⁰

Problems, questions and decisions were settled in popular assemblies which took place at the times of the new and full moon. On these occasions too the men were chosen who were to function as judges in matters of doubt and legal disputes. The priests, the only people allowed to inflict punishments, ensured order and calm. People spoke in order of seniority and a suggestion was either rejected by a murmuring or accepted when the assembly beat their spears, called *framea*, together. There too criminals were sentenced.

Traitors and deserters are hanged on trees, while the coward, the unwarlike, the man stained with abominable vices, is plunged into the mire of the morass with a hurdle put over him.

Tacitus: *Germania* 12.1

The punishment depends on the crime: evil deeds had to be seen, while deeds of shame had to be hidden. Minor offences were punished with a fine of a number of horses and cattle.⁸¹

Religion

Caesar says that the Germani only worship gods they can see, like the Sun, Fire and the Moon, but they have no knowledge of other gods.⁸² Tacitus on the other hand mentions Mercury, the Latin name assigned to the God Woden, to whom the Germani make human sacrifices. He further mentions Hercules and Mars, corresponding to the Germanic gods Donar and Tiw, to whom only animal

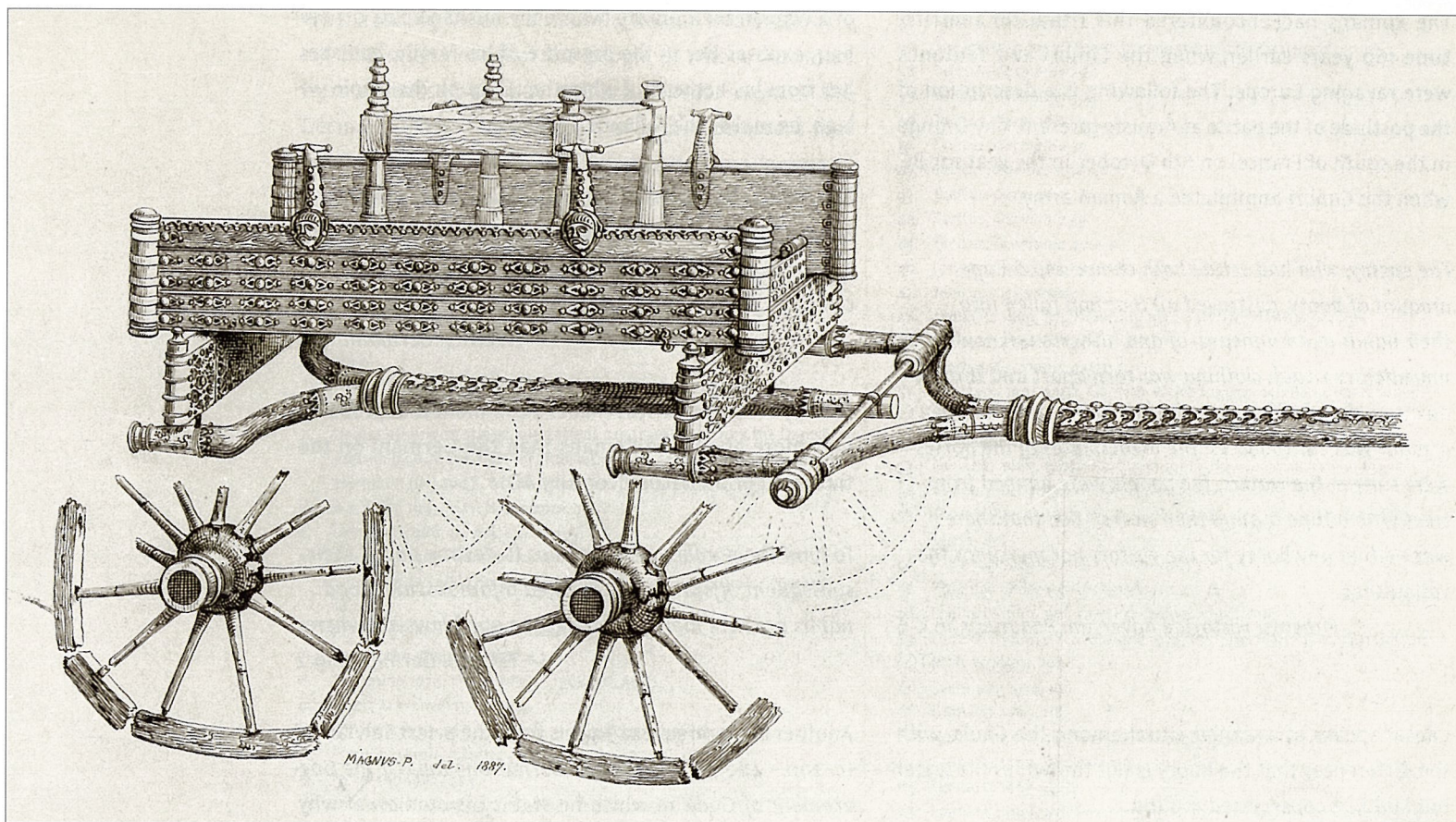


FIG. 13. *The Dejbjerg Wagon.*
Drawing by Magnus Petersen
from 1887. National Museum.

sacrifices were permitted. Tacitus also mentions the eastern goddess Isis. This identification is probably due to the fact that the divinity in question, like Isis, had a ship as her attribute.⁸³ Another divinity was the fertility goddess Nerthus, who was worshipped in northern Germania, as described above. Of Nerthus, Tacitus writes that in her sacred grove, there is

a chariot dedicated to the Goddess, covered over with a curtain, and which may be touched by none but the Priest. Whenever the Goddess is present in this holy vehicle, he is aware of her; and with profound veneration follows the motion of the chariot, which is always drawn by cows. Then days of rejoicing always ensue, and in all places to which she descends to honour with a visit and her company, feasts and recreation abound. They do not go to war and touch no weapons; every hostile weapon is hidden away; the only peace and repose are known and loved, until the same priest conducts the Goddess back to the sanctuary when she has tired of being with mortals.

Tacitus: *Germania* 40.3

Tacitus' 'chariot' may have been of the same type as the wagon we know from Dejbjerg in West Jutland (Fig. 13). As was the case with Nerthus, the Germani did not use buildings as sanctuaries, but rather natural places such as groves and forests or islands.⁸⁴

War offerings

One type of sacrifice that was presented to Woden and Tiw was war offerings. Before a battle, a tribe might dedicate the enemy army to the gods, which meant that all prisoners and all booty were sacrificed in the event of a victory. Such a sacrifice is described by Tacitus in his *Annales*, when the Hermunduri and the Chatti met in battle in the year 58 AD.

The war was a success for the Hermunduri, and the more disastrous to the Chatti because they had devoted, in the event of victory, the enemy's army to Mars and Mercury, a vow which consigns horses, men, everything indeed on the vanquished side to destruction.

Tacitus: *Annales* 13.57.2

The Romans had encountered this ritual for the first time 160 years earlier, when the Cimbri and Teutones were ravaging Europe. The following is a description of the postlude of the battle at Arausio (present-day Orange in the south of France) on 6th October in the year 105 BC, when the Cimbri annihilated a Roman army.

The enemy, who had seized both camps and a huge amount of booty, destroyed all that had fallen into their hands in an unheard-of and hitherto unknown maledictory ritual; clothing was torn apart and thrown away, gold and silver were thrown in the river, the men's armour was cut to pieces, the breastplates of the horses were sunk in the waters, the people were hanged from trees with a rope around their necks, such that there was neither any booty for the visitors nor mercy for the vanquished.

Orosius: *Historiae Adversum Paganos* 5.16.5-6
(TG)

Caesar speaks of a similar ritual among the Gauls, with the differences that the booty is not thrown in the water but laid in a consecrated mound.

To him, [Mars] when they have determined to engage in battle, they commonly vow those things which they shall take in war. When they have conquered, they sacrifice whatever captured animals may have survived the conflict, and collect the other things into one place. In many states you may see piles of these things heaped up in their consecrated spots; nor does it often happen that any one, disregarding the sanctity of the case, dares either to secrete in his house things captured, or take away those deposited; and the most severe punishment, with torture, has been established for such a deed.

Caesar: *De Bello Gallico* 6.17.3-5

Morality

Several writers used descriptions of the barbarians as contrasts with the moral decline of their own societies. In Tacitus' description of marriage among the Germani, he makes thinly-veiled allusions to the contemporary Roman view of the institution. After describing the punishment

of a woman for adultery, where the husband cuts off her hair, exposes her in the presence of his family, banishes her from his home, and whips her through the whole village, he makes the following remark:

The loss of chastity meets with no indulgence; neither beauty, youth, nor wealth will procure the culprit a husband. No one in Germany laughs at vice, nor do they call it the fashion to corrupt and to be corrupted.

Tacitus: *Germania* 19.1

Shortly after this Tacitus makes a comment that probably says more about the Romans than the Germani on the threshold of the second century AD:

To limit the number of children or to destroy any of their subsequent offspring is accounted infamous, and good habits are here more effectual than good laws elsewhere.

Tacitus: *Germania* 19.2

Another more direct example is from the priest Salvianus' (c. 400 – 480 AD) work *De Gubernatione Dei* (*Of the Government of God*), in which he states his opinion of why the Western Roman Empire is about to perish. The work, which is in eight books, was probably written in the course of the 440s.⁸⁵ The Western Roman Empire fell in 476 AD. Salvianus sees the attack by the Germani as God's punishment of the Romans for their debauchery. He reviews the moral superiority of the Germani in various contexts, and concludes:

We should be ashamed, we Romans everywhere, we should be ashamed of our conduct. Hardly any city is without a whorehouse, none at all is without vices, except for the cities where the barbarians are now. And we wonder that things are going so wretchedly for us, we who are so immoral. We wonder that the enemy is superior in strength, we who in virtue are their inferiors. We wonder that they who despise our vices seize our possessions. It is not the natural strength of the body that permits them to win, nor is it our natural weakness that causes us to be defeated. Let no one be persuaded otherwise, let no one assume otherwise: it is our moral failings that have conquered us.

Salvianus: *De Gubernatione Dei* 7.108 (JH/TG)

When reading the accounts of the Roman and Greek writers, one must note that the people to whom the works were addressed already had a particular view of the Germani. Moreover, one must of course be aware that much information is based almost entirely on Tacitus as a source. A more nuanced, objective picture can only be obtained by considering the relevant archaeological material in the interpretation and description.

NOTES

1. A.A. Lund 1993, 12ff; Høiris 2001, 28ff.
2. Unless otherwise stated, quotations are translated from the Danish edition by A.A. Lund. Other translations are from Danish versions by J. Hermann (JH) and T. Grane (TG) or are from standard English editions.
3. A.A. Lund 1993, 16ff; Høiris 2001, 72ff.
4. Hermann 1988, 14; A.A. Lund 1993, 51f.
5. See for example Pomponius Mela, *De chorographia* 3.3.25; Diodorus Siculus, 5.32.1 and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 14.1.2-4.
6. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 37.35.
7. E.g. Strabo, *Geographiká* 1.4.3.
8. Svennung 1974, 7ff; Hermann 1988, 51f, 432ff.
9. Goetz & Welwei 1995a, 44.
10. Lennartz 1969, 36f; Hermann 1991, 538; Hermann 1992, 520f.
11. Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.43-45.
12. Hermann 1988, 442.
13. Diodorus Siculus, 5.32.1; Goetz & Welwei 1995a, 80.
14. Dio Cassius, 39.49.1-2.
15. Lennartz 1969, 37.
16. Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* 6.10, 6.25.1-4.
17. Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* 1.37.3-4, 2.4.10, 4.1.1-4.3.4.
18. Florus, 2.30.21-28; Orosius, *Historiae adversum paganos* 6.21.12-16.
19. Strabo, *Geographiká* 7.1.3-7.1.5.
20. Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana* 2.105-109.
21. Lennartz 1969, 63ff.
22. Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia* 3.25, 29-30.
23. Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia* 3.32, 56.
24. Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia* 3.31-32.
25. Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia* 3.54; Hermann 1988, 301.
26. Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia* 3.54; A.A. Lund 1993, 220f.
27. Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia* 3.54; Hermann 1988, 300f, 548.
28. Lennartz 1969, 65; Hermann 1988, 548f.
29. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 4.99-101, 106, 16.2.
30. Hermann 1988, 566.
31. Lennartz 1969, 73f; Svennung 1974, 67ff.
32. Svennung 1974, 70ff; Hermann 1988, 567f.
33. Lennartz 1969, 74ff.
34. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 4.97, 4.103, 18.121, 37.36-37.
35. Tacitus, *Germania* 2.2.
36. See the map for all the tribes mentioned by Tacitus.
37. Tacitus, *Germania* 29.1.
38. Tacitus, *Germania* 30.
39. Tacitus, *Germania* 32.
40. Tacitus, *Germania* 35.
41. Tacitus, *Annales* 11.18-20.
42. Tacitus, *Germania* 37.1.
43. Tacitus, *Germania* 39.
44. Tacitus, *Germania* 40.2-4.
45. Lennartz 1969, 83; Hermann 1990, 238f.
46. Tacitus, *Germania* 41.
47. Lennartz 1969, 87; Svennung 1974, 19ff; Hermann 1990, 250.
48. Tacitus, *Germania* 45.1.
49. Tacitus, *Germania* 445.2-5.
50. Hermann 1991, 553ff; Goetz & Welwei 1995a, 35f; Berggren & Jones 2000.
51. Ptolemy, *Geographikè Hyphêgesis* 2.9.2, 7-9; 2.11.
52. Lennartz 1969, 100ff; Hermann 1991, 561f; Goetz & Welwei 1995a, 168ff.
53. Ptolemy, *Geographikè Hyphêgesis* 2.11.12.
54. Tacitus, *Annales* 4.72.3-4.73.1; Hermann 1991, 578; Goetz & Welwei 1995a, 171.
55. Ptolemy, *Geographikè Hyphêgesis* 2.11.2.
56. Ptolemy, *Geographikè Hyphêgesis* 2.11.16.
57. Lennartz 1969, 117f; Goetz & Welwei 1995a, 176.
58. Lennartz 1969, 118; Svennung 1974, 198f; Hermann 1991, 585; Goetz & Welwei 1995a, 190.
59. Svennung 1974, 198.
60. Lennartz 1969, 118.
61. Hermann 1991, 585; Goetz & Welwei 1995a, 190.
62. Lennartz 1969, 118; Hermann 1991, 585.
63. Lennartz 1969, 122ff.
64. Lennartz 1969, 128; Svennung 1974, 198, 208, 212ff; Hermann 1991, 585; Goetz & Welwei 1995a, 190.
65. Lennartz 1969, 128; Goetz & Welwei 1995a, 190.
66. Svennung 1974, 208; Hermann 1991, 585.
67. Svennung 1974, 57ff, 208ff.
68. Svennung 1974, 217ff.
69. Hermann 1991, 585.
70. Lund Hansen 1987, 253; Lund Hansen *et al.* 1995, 390f; Storgaard 2001b, 104ff.
71. Martens, J. 2002, 90ff.
72. Lund Hansen *et al.* 1995, 374ff.
73. Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* 4.3.1-2, 6.23.1; Tacitus, *Germania* 16.1.
74. Tacitus, *Germania* 15.1, 26.3.
75. Tacitus, *Germania* 13.1, 24.1.
76. Tacitus, *Germania* 7.1, 14.1.
77. Tacitus, *Germania* 13.2-3.
78. Tacitus, *Germania* 10.1.
79. Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* 1.50.4.
80. Tacitus, *Germania* 11.1-12.3.
81. Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* 6.21.2.
82. Tacitus, *Germania* 9.1; Hermann 1990, 158f.
83. Tacitus, *Germania* 9.2, 40.2-3.
84. Hermann 1992, 538.